THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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Visiting With Milton

May I touch upon what seem to me two widespread misinterpretations involving Milton? First, I think that most editors and teachers err in their interpretation of the concluding lines of Milton's sonnet to Mr. Lawrence:

> He who of those delights can judge, and spare
> To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

These lines are generally held to mean something like this: the person who can appreciate such pleasures as these and yet refrain from indulging in them too often is wise. My opposition to this interpretation is two-fold, artistic and philological. In the first place, such a conclusion is incongruous with the preceding part of the sonnet. Milton is here making a case for indulgence in moderate sociability. Why, then, should he sheer off into a note of caution before he has completed his recommendation? For the word "judge" does not carry a positive invitation to sociability. It is hard to believe that Milton would begin to build up a case for sociability and then in effect sabotage it at the last moment. I think that Milton meant to say: he who can appreciate these pleasures and can arrange to enjoy them occasionally is sensible. This view is supported by the word "sometimes" in line 3. To adopt any other interpretation seems to me to violate the spirit of the sonnet as a whole. My second reason for challenging the standard reading is philological. The usual editorial and classroom interpretation of "spare" is "refrain from"—and the word is of course often used in that sense. But "spare" also means to "reserve" or to "afford," a meaning which was employed in the seventeenth century. In the N.E.D. I find this definition: "To reserve, retain, set aside or store up for some particular use or purpose; to keep in reserve." And this one: "To set apart, save or give (time) from one's usual or ordinary duties or avocations; to have free, unoccupied, or unemployed." If these definitions of "spare" are adopted, the reading suggested above is sustained. In reply to those critics who have adhered to the standard interpretation because it seems more compatible with Milton's Puritan austerity, it may be pointed out that a modicum of caution is retained in the guarded affirmation "is not unwise" (in place of some more forthright phrase). In any case Milton is not here proposing a Walpurgis night. At least one early editor (Keightley) used the reading recommended here, but his interpretation appears to have fallen upon evil days. (Note: my apologies to any of my colleagues who have already adopted this reading: I speak at all only because the preponderance of opinion lies on the other side.)

My other mild protest this morning concerns the reading of the famous line in Wordsworth's sonnet to Milton,

> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart.

In book after book we are told with tedious iteration that Wordsworth was all wrong about this: Milton really took an active part in life. Well, Wordsworth was not so dumb; he knew that Milton wasn't always treading the empyrean. In fact he says as much in the concluding part of the sonnet—

> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart; . . . . .
> . . . and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Obviously the matter is one of emphasis; Wordsworth meant that Milton's **soul** dwelt apart. And it did.

Alexander Cowie,
Wesleyan University.

Worms Turning

President Mark Van Doren's note of humility in his acceptance statement cannot, because of its obvious sincerity, be termed false modesty. There is, however, a less admirable note akin to it that runs all through the letters, addresses, and discussions of our colleagues engaged in criticizing and overhauling the teaching of English language and literature in our colleges.

It seems time, therefore, to call a halt to the snivellings, the severe brest-beatings and scourgings which our members apparently enjoy giving themselves and their colleagues, as if we were largely responsible for all the aches and pains of modern education whether in times of war or of peace. Though as President Van Doren reminds us, we are, in spite of our learning, woefully ignorant, and much remains to be done to make our work effective, I cannot accept the tacit indictment that English teachers in America have failed or that the Liberal Arts have failed. Nor can I subscribe to the notion that English teachers are lacking in a knowledge or appreciation of classical backgrounds or are ineffective in humanizing their teaching; nor as I survey the good teaching that has gone on for many years in the United States, or as I call the roll of men who have been doing distinguished teaching, do I find cause for pessimism, complaint, or too much heart-searching.

If, isolated as we are in our departments and localities, we do not know personally all of these men, we hear frequently of their work and know what the students they have sent out from their class rooms represent in cultural tastes and scholarly achievements. We know that inspiring teaching is being done, even if it is unheralded in College News Letters and other organs of personal examination. A perusal of the extensive report put out some time ago at Illinois on the various methods of teaching languages and literature now in vogue might well give an outsider the impression that the many voices crying "Lo here! Lo there!" reveal only utter confusion and bankruptcy.

If, however, we are wise enough not to take too seriously these professional surveys by self-appointed critics of our incompetence, but look rather at the record of good teaching that has been going on for years up and down this land by able and learned teachers, we need not feel faint hearted.

Let us glance over some of this positive achievement. Consider first the oldsters—the beneficent influence through the years of Burges Johnson at Vassar and Union, of William Allan Neilsen at Smith, of Lane Cooper at Cornell, of John Erskine first at Amherst and then at Columbia—a veritable Dean of Humanities; of H. Carrington Lancaster at Hopkins, of Chauncey Brewster Tinker and Billy Phelps at Yale. Some scholars are inclined to scoff at the last named, but it is an improverished English Department in any college or university that does not have some one like him who can induce football players to read **The Ring and the Book** once a year. Think then of the Van Dorens at Columbia, Howard Mumford Jones at Harvard, Matthew Black and Cornelius Weygandt at Pennsylvania, Charles Louis Townsend at Southwestern, Wilson O. Clough at Wyoming, George F. Reynolds at Colorado, Waldo Dunn first at Wooster, now at Claremont, and Howard Lowry, late of Princeton. The list could easily be extended; in fact anyone of us could make up a list of his own that would bring him satisfaction.

The charge, then, that English teachers have failed is, to say the least, greatly exaggerated. Distinguished English teaching is being done in every section of our land, could we be less myopic and recognize it.

Let us rather cease for a time these unmanly underratings, these whinings, and lamentations,—take heart, and chant with Bobbie Burns:

> "But, Willie, set your fit to mine,
> And cock your crest!
> We'll gar our streams and burnies shine
> Up wi' the best."

Robert M. Smith,
Lehigh University.

Fragments

Should college instructors try to eliminate "fragments" from freshman themes—at least in Exposition courses? By "fragment," of course, is meant a phrase or dependent clause written as if it were a complete sentence, like **The whole arm** in the following: "There must be a quick full sweep of the bow arm for that tonic chord. The whole arm."

Modern fiction contains many fragments. However, I have justified my opposition to fragments on the ground that my students were writing exposition, not fiction. I realized, though, that if magazine non-fiction (i.e., expository) articles contained many fragments, I might not have a leg to stand on.

Consequently, I checked the expository articles in one issue each of **Harper's, Collier's, The Saturday Evening Post, The American Magazine,** and **Liberty.** I chose Harper's because I was reading it when the idea occurred to me. I chose the others because they were the ones concerning which I had been interviewed shortly before by a "poll taker," and because they are "popular."

There were 48 articles in all, with a total of 7,691 sentences. Of these sentences, 117 were fragments, or about one and one-half per cent (.0152 plus) of the whole. At that rate, my students could have one fragment for every 65 or 66 sentences; or, one in every third theme, because their 500-word themes average about 28 sentences each.

However, the foregoing is too high a percentage of fragments for themes because 56 of the 117 were in quoted matter purporting to reproduce what someone had said. Such fragments are legitimate because we often do speak in fragments. Professional feature writers frequently use direct quotation; my students seldom do.

Deducting these 56 "legitimate" fragments from the total of 117, we have 61 fragments outside of quoted matter, or about eight-tenths of one per cent (.0079 plus) of the 7,691 sentences. By this standard, a student could have only one fragment for every 126 sentences, or one fragment in about every fifth theme.

I shall continue to fight fragments. And my students will continue to write fragments until somewhere, somehow, they learn enough grammar to be able to distinguish a phrase or a dependent clause from a sentence. Which is another story.

Maurice Hicklin
Hamboldt State College
California

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Editorial

We fall into the habit of thinking and talking about "post-war" problems as though they were remote, and we could deliberate about them in our leisure moments. But the fact is that they face us now. A million and a half young men and women have already been discharged from service for one reason or another, and for them the post-war problem of further education is not a vague and abstract question. They are now living in the post-war period and its problems are slapping them in the face. Many of them, possibly most of them, want more education in one form or another. With some it may be night-school; with others planned reading and an open mind to welcome every chance educational experience; but with most it is a search for more formal schooling; and when they find what they think they want, they will demand the best results from it.

Blatant advertising is shouting in their ears and confronting their eyes with alluring and specious promises. "Learn to write, learn to speak effectively, learn to address a board of directors, learn to create stories and poems and plays! Learn all these things, in six months or three months or a dozen lessons by mail. "In competition with all of this, the colleges are saying "fit yourself to our pattern, enter our classrooms and take what we choose to give you, advancing at a pace long ago determined, and gauged to meet an average need. Perhaps you will acquire all of these skills and perhaps you won't; but you can wear the label of a college-bred man and therefore find it easier to get a job".

This is a harsh way of describing the problem as it might present itself to a large percentage of the million and a half young men and women who have already been discharged, and as it will present itself to five or six million still to return. It is undoubtedly a cynical way of defining the problem in terms of English teaching. But the question faces us now and not in some vague future: What have we to offer and how shall we define it in terms they will understand;—truthfully and without the ballyhoo of the professional recruiter of students?

The Infantry Journal has distributed to the armed forces in camps and overseas more than one hundred thousand copies of a special paper edition of "Freedom Speaks", a compendium of the "ideals of Democracy in poetry and prose", compiled by George F. Reynolds and Donald F. Connors, under the sponsorship of CEA.

The College English Association, since its inception six years ago, has valued the friendship and practical good will of a considerable group of textbook publishers. During that time, Editorial Fiat has limited their use of advertising space to a maximum of four inches in any one issue by any one firm. Within that restricted space they have confined their "copy" to announcements of actual news value to our membership, and in return we have reason to believe that our members have studied those announcements with advantage to themselves and our advertisers. And in this connection we send our congratulations to the firm of D. C. Heath & Company, now completing sixty years of service to education.

We are in receipt of a special offer which, we are assured, is sent out "to a selected list of persons known to be seriously interested in learning to write for profit". In return for one dollar we will receive an entire month's "text and assignments of a valuable correspondence course plus a valuable extension lecture by an experienced writer". This combination, we are assured, will "start us on the road to a writing career."

The principle objection to this sort of advertising in the magazines, as we see it, is not that it promises something for almost nothing; because it is quite possible that anyone who is eager to improve himself in the art of writing will benefit by any sort of program if he works hard at it. But the constant repetition of such specious promises tends to build up a notion in the average mind that education in any field of knowledge is something which is projected upon us from without, by a series of recipes and precepts.

"If a correspondence course can make a skilled writer out of my son or daughter in twenty lessons at a dollar a lesson, why can't the State University do it in four years? Isn't that what my school taxes are for?" says the simple-hearted citizen. So more than one college catalog is now making similar promises. "All you have to do is pay the tuition; we deliver the goods."

Gleaned From the Mail

Dear Editor,

I was interested in your remark that you were beginning to weed out your library and give away a lot of your books. Is it a sign of wisdom to decide to give up some of the footnotes to our intellectual life and just release a lot of stuff we had already give up in fact though we wouldn't admit it? I have lying around rejected scholarly notes from fifteen years ago that I still think I will get out, and fool the editors with them again sometime. They might as well go in the waste basket, for the world would little note nor long remember anyhow.

(Reprinted without permission, therefore Anon.)

Dear Editor,

So much comment has been written in recent months on the study of American Literature in college and high school, that English teachers in general feel a satisfaction that this course, the Cinderella of the curriculum, has been brought into the open. The English Department of our college, long before the war proved that in American schools the subject was not being given the attention it merited, introduced a four-point course to be taken in the Freshman year. Up to the present, that course has been continued. We are eager, however, to discover the viewpoint of other colleges on the subject. Is a four-point course too much to assign to American Literature, since its best writers appear only in the late 19th and 20th centuries? Our first semester covers from the colonial period to about 1860; the second, from 1860 to the present time. Would it be more feasible to omit entirely the early writers, and confine our efforts to the 19th and 20th centuries? We wonder if representatives of the English Departments of some of our colleges would be kind enough to discuss this matter in the pages of the News Letter.

Sister Mary Angeline
College of Notre Dame,
Baltimore.

Calling All Members!

As the paper shortage becomes less severe, and more skilled compositors return from service, this Product of Pedagogical Prescience will celebrate by returning to an occasional six-page issue. We feel a certain embarassment whenever our friendly advertisers ask for nearly as much space as that required by our contributors. Loyal members must become more cooperative if added columns are to be filled with profit to all concerned. The paper can continue to provide a forum for profitable exchange of ideas, opinions and experiences only if more of our members become articulate. As soon as YOU finish reading this paragraph, please prove your amiability by writing something for a summer issue.

Mechanical Aids

The University of New Mexico Department of English has Professor Burges Johnson to thank for an introduction to the balopticon, an instrument combining slide and opaque projection, which is particularly useful in composition courses. At Professor Johnson's suggestion, we installed a balopticon, mounted on an easily rolling stand to permit use in several different classrooms. A few of my colleagues are, like me, enthusiastic converts to this projection study; others still ruggedly resist the mechanization of the field of English, heretofore invaded only by the blackboard and chalk.

Projection of themes for discussion, particularly in first semester freshman exposition, is for me the primary use of the machine. For approximately one hour a week, my students and I study their themes on the screen, both before and after the formal grading. We analyze good paragraph structure and bad; we compare thin, illogical outlines with adequate, consistent ones; we can catch at once favorable reader reaction to concrete, interesting detail; we follow longer themes with criticims and suggestion from their outlines through proposed revisions to the final draft. By way of teacher and text these are, of course familiar and sometimes monotonous pathways; by way of the balopticon, the eye provides many shortcuts, underscores defects and merits, draws a class quickly together for study and comment. We simply capitalize, of course, on a habit our students formed at their first movies.

To me, the chief advantage of the balopticon theme study is that both teacher and student are more pitilessly exposed to the judgment of the group — and the results sobering for everyone. At first the stage fright wasn't all one-sided

(Continued on Page 3)

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Society Is to Blame

The condition exposed by the recent history test, described by Henry F. Pringle in a recent "Saturday Evening Post", could not have been news to many teachers. Indeed, it hardly could have been a surprise. The delinquency discovered happened to be in American history. It could easily have been found in other basic fields of American education.

In English, for example, many students are noticeably deficient. The same is true in mathematics. Yet Americans are not worried about the average student's poor language usage or his lack of acquaintance with literature. The idea is that most of us know enough sounds and accents of our language to get us by, so why bother with the frills? Until the war only a handful of students took courses in mathematics. "Who", it was reasoned, "would ever need the finer points of mathematics?" And Latin: "Who ever dreams of using any Latin?" Yet, second only to the study of English itself, Latin offers the best study of our language.

Society does not encourage real study of these basic and cultural subjects. They are not utilitarian enough for us rapid-going Americans, so we leave them off and grab a skill or a crumb of content today that we can get a job with tomorrow and call ourselves educated. We make of our minds a shoveling floor on which we catch a few facts and several experiences of school and later we make our living by scooping them off to other people. American history doesn't happen to be either a skill or a craft and hence is a non-essential.

Where would you find a red-blooded, strong American boy who would swap his chance of earning a letter in athletics for a decent knowledge of American history? And John Fan has about the same attitude as the boy. (The boys and the fans comprise a considerable part of society.) As a rule, the fans do not bother about the scholarship of the squad until a favorite player gets caught by ineligibility. Usually the damage can be traced to some bespectacled teacher suffering with an ideal.

The history test is not very surprising in itself; it merely opens the door of a bad house. It indicates a type of delinquency found in other misplaced emphases of our living. Nowadays the church seems far more interested in enrolling a large membership than in critically examining the doctrine it preaches. More emphasis is laid on getting voters to the polls than in informing the citizenry on the issues.

Why not teach American history? There is no reason; but there is a stout reason for not **knowing** American history: Knowledge of history is not required. American history is not required. **You don't have to know history to be an acceptable citizen.**

Why were those thousands of college freshmen who were tested allowed to graduate from high school with such a superficial knowledge of history? It's the old story. They were graduated because they had attended high school for four years, and there were other young Americans coming up who were entitled to spend four years in high school. In short, high school pupils are graduated to college, and college students are graduated to society because the educational routine demands it. Time has been put in; the days and months have passed; graduation must follow.

So what has been exposed is not so much a lack of teaching, but rather a true and regrettable prospectus of attitude and low-knowledge standard of the mass of American people. The proper indictment is that too many American schools educate toward **education** rather than toward **knowledge.** And the condition is likely to continue as long as so little social value is placed upon the gaining of knowledge—knowledge **per se.**

Roland D. Carter,
University of Chattanooga.

BOOK NOTE

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Regional Meeting

A joint meeting of the CEA and the New York Council of English Teachers was held at Columbia University on Saturday, April 21. Dr. Mary A. Wyman of Hunter College presided at the morning session. The first speaker, Rev. Gerald G. Walsh, S. J., of Fordham University, talked of Dante, and the rich contribution which he might have made to a San Francisco Conference. All who listened to his talk gained as much from the speaker himself as from his words about Dante. There is no field of teaching in which a shallow background of training is more inexcusable than in English. Father Walsh, philosopher, historian and linguist introduced his listeners to Dante, the philosopher-poet, in such fashion as to bring him up to the very threshold of the present moment. Doctor Elizabeth Schneider, of Temple University, discussed two by-products of Romanticism.

Dr. Burges Johnson led discussion by means of a series of questions addressed to each speaker, first asking Father Walsh to justify any catalog distinctions between "English" and "Comparative Literature"; and asking Dr. Schneider to justify the customary assignment of Romanticism and Realism, to certain definite periods of time. Very many of those present joined in the discussion which was allowed to range over a wide field.

At the luncheon which followed, Dr. Ernest H. Wright, Chairman of Columbia's Department of English, presided, and introduced Dr. Max Herzberg, former President of the National Council, who talked of the International Aspects of Humor, which he defined in original and controversial fashion, and then discussed America's contribution to humorous literature and European attitudes toward it. The second speaker was Dr. Gay Allen, Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation, who drew from his exhaustive knowledge of Walt Whitman many facts which served to indicate the extent of Whitman's fame and his following throughout England and the continent.

Dr. Thomas Mabbott of Hunter College led discussion, skilfully inducing many to share in it. The informality of the entire meeting, the great extent to which those present shared in discussion, and the practical value of the papers to those engaged in literature teaching set a pattern for future local meetings. Adjournment was at 3:30 P. M., leaving time for social getting together, and proving that much may be crowded into a single daylight meeting, without fatigue. —B. J.

Mechanical Aids

(Continued from Page 2)

as the early papers of the embarrassed authors were thrown on the screen. Slovenly form, poorly followed assignments, thin writing came out in the cold glare for all to see and complain about; furthermore my own grading—comments, script, graphic clarity, judgment among all papers of the set—was also on the spot, and rightly. I found it a morale builder on both sides of the desk to encourage criticism of my corrections along with that of the student writing. The classroom became a more democratic — and certainly **more** articulate—forum where all of us tried to pool our advice and more of us learned from each other because the balopticon admitted everyone to intimate acquaintance with the theme at hand. In the old way of reading, only the instructor and the author were not condemned to grope, half-comprehending, in the auditory regions—a netherworld for composition study if there ever was one.

Student reaction has been uniformly interested and favorable. One or two complaints that the projection is insufficiently magnified and the area of coverage (about 5" x 6" of text) too small are justified and are a problem for the operator. I wish the machine could display an entire 8 x 11 page. Sometimes we minimized this difficulty by having the author read his work as it was being shown; this sound track helped pronunciation and delivery, too.

The balopticon is helpful in other ways. It puts illustrative material from supplementary texts quickly and clearly before a class; it is a natural tool for diagrams and maps. The Austerlitz and Borodino chapters of **War and Peace,** which my second semester freshmen were reading as Hitler's legions followed Napoleon's old

(Continued on Page 4)

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The Germans, according to Atwood H. Townsend, owe the rest of the world $40,000 per German family (**Free World,** March). In Spain, the southern peasants need land; the northern, industrial opportunity (**Fortune,** March). All Europe must win freedom from its shame (Borgese, **Life,** Mar. 12), just as only a strong, united Asia can keep the peace (Lattimore, in **Com. Sense,** March). Cruical years lie ahead for the Philippines (Sayre, **Atlantic**), and a billion-dollar dam across the world's fourth largest river would effectively start Chinese industrialization (**New Rep.,** Mar. 26), as well as form an outlet for American investment.

Wales, traditional Land of Song (**Brit. Today,** Feb.), is still completely separate from its neighbor, in which, as here, Beveridge's new book is being widely discussed (**e.g., Nation,** Mar. 3; **New Rep.,** Mar. 5); he would eliminate unemployment, 100 percent. In England, public and voluntary services already overlap (**Brit. Today,** Feb.), and George Soule tells us that its people differ from ours in being aware of the war, and in determining to face the future realistically (**New Rep.,** Mar. 5).

David Lawrence, lamenting the failure of Yalta (**U. S. News,** Mar. 16), lugubriously forecasts the "Biggest Army, Navy, and Air Force in the World." But Governor Stassen thinks (**Vital Sp.,** Mar. 15) that observance of seven cardinal points will make San Francisco the "Golden Gate to Peace." "A Century of Engineering" (**Sci. Am.,** Feb.) has brought us cartels (Milo Perkins, **Harper's**) and the monopolistic suppression of patents —another topic being widely discussed (**Vital Sp.,** Mar. 1; **Am. Schol.,** Spring). John D. Rockefeller, Jr., urges (**Vital Sp.,** Mar. 1) a return to Christianity, but a philosopher (**Fortune,** March) vigorously exhorts the businessmen, as the group with most vital energy, to save the world.

Misleading group images are betraying democracy (MacIver, **Am. Schol.,** Spring). The liberal college, then, should encourage good judgment in human affairs (Nick, **J. H. Ed.,** March), should focus their curricula on training for wiser citizenship (**J. H. Ed.,** Feb.). For the future of books in America the teachers of English are responsible (**Coll. Eng.,** March), but the scientists too are awake to their share in the future (**Am. Scientist,** Jan.). The **American Scholar,** its editor announces cheerfully in presenting Albert Einstein, "is an experiment in making important and sometimes difficult subjects comprehensible." **United Nations Plans for Post-War Education** are outlined in the Foreign Policy Bulletin of March 1. Exchange scholarships with foreign countries are in great favor; the State of Washington has recently endowed fifty, the Michigan College of Mining and Technology, twenty-five.

While we speculate, at leisure, on the Third World War, warns Norman Cousins (**SRL,** Mar. 3), we are forgetting that it means annihilation. The present crisis is stimulating an enormous amount of thinking, concludes P. W. Bridgman (**Yale Rev.** Spring), but not enough. Social thinking, difficult but now required, must be undertaken consciously; swiftly the world unifies, and may freeze into a set pattern. Now, while opportunity is still ours, cosmic influences play upon us. "Passengers on Planet Earth" (**Free World,** Mar), as we strive to learn something, through science, of our temporary home. We might make of it a **Planetary Democracy,** say Oliver L. Reiser and Blodwen Davies, in their book subtitled "An Introduction to Scientific Humanism and applied Semantics" (Creative Age Press, 1944).

A. V. Hall

Mechanical Aids

(Continued from Page 3)

trail back from Moscow, were much more easily handled when the balopticon gave us quick access to maps and battlefield diagrams. Elizabethan stage plans, costume detail, and Shakespearian stage history were illuminated via the balopticon, though I must confess that the picture-collecting instinct in all us pedants may permit the machine to trap us into wasting too much class time on mere picture shows if we are not on guard. The balopticon was a time-saver for me with the Shakespeare course, too, as it provided a quick means to present an unusual amount of spot passage material as part of a course final.

All in all, the balopticon is a tool my students and I enjoy. We would welcome advice from its other users concerning ways to extend its service.

Katherine Simons,
University of New Mexico.

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